

ENHANCED MANAGEMENT

By Kimberley Morrill

National FARM Program and Version 3.0 changes

Farmers Assuring Responsible Management, FARM, demonstrates dairy farmers ongoing commitment to the highest standards and shows consumers that what farmers are doing is what's right for the cows. Created by the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), with support from Dairy Management Inc. (DMI), the National Dairy FARM Program raises the bar for the entire industry, and creates a culture of continuous improvement. Over 82 cooperatives and processors, representing nearly 98% of the US milk supply, currently participate in the National FARM Program.

How does FARM work? The National Dairy FARM Program helps establish on-farm, best management practices through the use of the FARM Animal Care Reference Manual. These guidelines continually evolve to represent the latest research on quality animal care. The Manual, corresponding training videos, and producer resources detail the highest animal care standards, including animal health, from birth to end of life; facilities and housing; nutrition; equipment and milking procedures; and transportation and animal handling.

The National Dairy FARM Program is reviewed every three years by the technical writing group. This group reviews feedback from current evaluators and producers, including recent research to update the FARM Program guidelines and Manual. During the most recent review, changes were made to multiple chapters of the Manual and phase one and two priority areas were identified. The National Dairy FARM Version 3.0 changes went into effect on January 1, 2017.

Phase One Priority Areas include:

- Veterinarian Client Patient Relationship (VCPR)
 - Official form signed by Veterinarian of Record, and dairy farm owner. This must be reviewed and signed on an annual basis.
- Dairy Cattle Care Ethics and Training Agreement signed annually by all employees with animal care responsibilities indicating they: received training in stockmanship AND areas of responsibility; will not abuse animals; and will report any abuse witnessed.
- No tail docking after January 1, 2017.

If a Phase One Priority Area is not met during a farm's official FARM evaluation, this will create a Mandatory Corrective Action

The National Dairy FARM Version 3.0 changes went into effect on January 1, 2017 and includes two phases.

Plan (MCAP). A MCAP is a written plan agreed upon between the dairy producer and FARM second Party Evaluator and/or Veterinarian of Record that outlines necessary steps to comply with Priority One Animal Care Standards. Such MCAP requires re-evaluation not to exceed one year's time. Failure to complete the MCAP may result in a Notice of Removal from the FARM program.

Phase Two Priority Areas include:

- Herd Health Plan, which includes written protocols for: newborn and milk-fed dairy calves; pain management; non-ambulatory animal management; euthanasia; and access and availability of proper feed and clean water.
- Animal observations by evaluator – Only a percentage of the herd (cows and heifers) will be scored. This is based on herd size.
 - Lameness: Less than 5% of lactating cows score a 3 (score of 1 to 3).
 - Body Condition: Less than 1% of the dairy herd has a body condition score < 2 on a 5 point scale.
 - Hock/Knee: Less than 5% of the dairy herd has a hock or knee score of 3 (on a 3 point scale).

If Phase Two Priority Areas are not met, this creates a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). A CIP is a written document that is developed by the farm owner, their evaluator and any other trusted advisors. It identifies area(s) for improvement in animal care. It specifies actions to make the improvement and includes a suggested timeline for completion. All CIPs must be addressed within a three-year time frame, or prior to the next FARM evaluation.

Preparing for evaluation: Resources are available on the National FARM website at www.nationaldairyfarm.com. These include templates for herd health plans and written protocols, templates for employee training, and animal care documentation. Along with templates, the website contains a self-assessment checklist, the FARM Animal Care Manual and training videos.

For questions about the FARM program contact myself, Emily Yeiser Stepp at NMPF, or your milk co-op field representative. □

Kimberley Morrill, PhD, (kmm434@cornell.edu) is a Regional Dairy Specialist with the North Country Regional Ag Team.